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PARADIGMS OF POLISH LINGUISTICS AT THE TURN OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

Ewa Jędrzejko

The situation of language and linguistics in the age of intensive, multidirectional transformations in most (if not all) areas of life and communications, has been the central issue of specific and synthetic studies. Unsurprisingly, it has also become the dominant theme of methodological and metalinguistic reflection of scholars focusing upon the present state and cognitive perspectives of their discipline “after structuralism”. These transformations seem concurrent with the fact that in the recent years the territory of linguistic research has vastly expanded, or (perhaps more precisely) that linguistics’ “center of gravity” has shifted beyond the limits of the traditional subject area of the discipline. Today, the problems in the focus of scholarly attention are mainly those of the plane of *parole*, such as the use of language, text, discourse, communication styles, or speech/text genres. Consequently, the dominant element of Morris’s semiotic triad¹ — is now pragmatics. Therefore, questions occupying the center-stage of contemporary linguistics mainly concern the role of the speaker and the recipient, the context of the utterance, and other extralinguistic factors (of social, political, or psychological provenance) determining modes of the use of language in communications of various types: artistic as well as non-artistic, public as well as private, spoken as well as written.

Civilization developments that took place throughout the 20th c. (described, with good reasons, as “logocentric”), transformations related to globalization, mediatization of culture, progressing democratization of social relations, etc., have left their stamps upon language. As a consequence, it has been possible to observe the emergence of new vocabulary, increased activity of

¹ i.e. semantics-grammar-pragmatics.

certain grammatical categories, erosion of older patterns of speech and the birth of new discursive styles as well as other processes related to the overall cultural transformations. These processes, along with changes in the area of the genre, have become the subject of linguistic description. Genre modifications, the emergence of new genres as well as the diffusion of genres, which, until recently, have remained relatively distinct and stable and whose multifaceted characteristics have largely become blurred today. Language has become entangled in the net: both metaphorically (the network of various external interdependencies) and literally (the Internet, the World Wide Web) — with all the consequences thereof. One of these consequences is the opening up of new vistas for research brought about by the increase in the area of computerization: the discipline has benefited immensely from the simplicity of the registration, possibilities of ordering and speed of processing of an enormous number of facts of language, to which the rapid development of corpus linguistics (also in Poland), undoubtedly testifies. Corpora of linguistic material have proven invaluable to researchers, especially those specializing in the field of modern electronic lexicography and working on a variety of mono- and multilingual dictionaries. It is now possible to design new research tasks, the realization of which without the aid of the computer technology would take impractically long, as would be the case in the description of the transformations in the systemic potential of languages (both in the area of the more “conservative” grammar and in the space of the fast-changing lexicon or new phraseology) in a longitudinal perspective and in many varieties simultaneously.

The civilization changes determine new patterns of speech/writing; they exert an impact upon the shaping of the new types of a sender and of the receiver of language; they influence the establishment of the new relations between the former and the latter and cause the emergence of new needs in the space of communications. These and many other developments pose questions concerning the changes in the internal stratification of language in the light of the birth of the new varieties, genres as well as in the face of the ongoing modifications and transformations within the system of the styles of speech. Despite the fact that the alterations in the language of imaginative fiction and poetry have been attracting the attention of the stylists for quite some time now, it needs to be observed that it is only the research of today that is capable of encompassing the whole *continuum* of speech (including, for instance, the language of politics, media or advertising). The heretofore unknown scale of the expansion of contemporary discursive space (e.g. related to the emergence of interactive media) provokes questions concerning both the transformations of the styles of speech and generic patterns and the influence of the media upon interpersonal relations. The existence of such an influence is evident in the light of the birth of new patterns of communication behaviors, in the invasion of colloquialisms, or in the increase of the “informational noise”, immersed in which an individ-

ual frequently becomes lost in his or her search for modes of expression adequate in the contexts of particular situations.

It therefore seems that among major requirements posed by the era of globalization — and, consequently, major challenges to the linguistics of “national languages” — is the acceleration of work upon the development of software dedicated to automated (computer- or human-aided) multilingual translation. Such a requirement frequently makes linguists return to the problems insufficiently studied before or those previously marginalized by the structuralist paradigms of research, which — until relatively recently — dominated the discipline. In the light of contemporary propositions of multiparadigmatic “open linguistics”, these problems receive a new dimension thus gaining a chance to be eventually explained².

New ideas and concepts at the foundations of substructural linguistics — including such disciplines as cognitive-cultural linguistics, ethnolinguistics, feminist stylistics, text- and discourse linguistics — allows contemporary research to account for the “human factor” (in its sociocultural, cultural-civilizational, or psychological aspects) to a much larger extent than has been the case so far. Present-day methodologies take into consideration external conditions responsible for the shaping of the individual and collective experience as well as mental processes related thereto; they acknowledge the importance of creative imagination and other elements, contributing to the complexity of the studied phenomena. Opening new vistas for the explanation of numerous facts of language (both universal and language-specific), the new developments in linguistics simultaneously give rise to new questions concerning the principles of verification/falsification of procedures, the possibilities of their application in the study of voluminous and/or varied linguistic material, etc.³

On the one hand, it is upon such and similar problems that the metalinguistic reflection focuses today. On the other hand, however, scholars emphasize the benefits of interdisciplinary stances and methodological pluralism. The overcoming of the inherited (often artificial) disciplinary limits does not only seem to invite fresh stimuli to the development of linguistics itself, but also — none the less importantly — appears to offer formerly non-existent opportunities for the development

² Among such problems are the collocational rules respecting word combinations, fixed phrases and complex signs of the verbal lexicon, such analytical structures as *popaść w rozpacz/fall into despair*. Such structures, due to the complexity of their form, their global senses, visual surplus of communicated contents in relation to the characteristics of an analogous simple verb (*rozpaczać/despair*), have proven not to lend themselves to explanation by means of structuralist tools. Units of this type — posing problems both in terms of their description and translation — ought to be registered by a dedicated mono- and multilingual dictionary; cf. JĘDRZEJKO, 1998, 2002.

³ These problems seem to be particularly relevant in the context of such currents as cognitive-cultural linguistics, which stresses the relations obtaining between language and thinking, imagination, cognitive experience, and historically determined ethnocultural reality. Likewise, some of the propositions put forth by the discipline of text studies (textology) arouse doubt.

of humanities understood broadly, i.e. as a complex macro-discipline dedicated to multidimensional reflection upon a variety of aspects of human culture.

Such observations also hold true in the context of Polish linguistics. The extension of the area of research and the multiplicity of methods characterized by a varying degree of the verifiability of produced results yield effects in terms of the increase in what seems to be a chaotic concurrence of ideas and terminology. At the same time, however, such a situation may well stem from the rise of the linguists' hopes to be able to encompass all those aspects of language that could not have been addressed within frames of the hereto existent theories.

Even in the space of strict theory a degree of terminological chaos can be observed — and even more: time and again, voices verbalizing the anxiety concerning the autonomy of linguistics as “the most strict discipline among the humanities”⁴ arise in their ominous sonority. Still, the consciousness of the multiplicity of conditions determining both language itself and all other phenomena delineating the area of humanities, is a permanent constituent of scholarly self-consciousness of today. At the same time, the proliferation of technologies boosting the potential of contemporary communications favors the exponential increase in the number of publications, whose avalanche is likely to overpower any individual researcher, no longer capable of keeping abreast of the day-to-day developments. (This is particularly clear in the context of the Internet: a medium whose status is irreducible to that of a mere vehicle of communication, and which has in itself become a communication generator — or even, according to McLuhan, is/has become a message in its own right).

This, too, next to the abundance of arising concepts, facilitates the diversification of professional sociolects and idiolects, which may encumber mutual understanding even among researchers representing one discipline. The age of Gutenberg may have come to its end (?), yet we still function in the space of the culture of writing, in the world of ceaseless narration, to which the language (along with its fixed conceptual structures, patterns of speech⁵ and paradigms of judgment conditioning the formation of perception of values in the world subjected to a variety of technologies of apprehension) is still the highest organizing instance. The above notwithstanding, however, there are reasons to make claims as to the reduction of the role of the word, especially in the “colloquially tinged” mass culture, in which the word is being ousted by the image,

⁴ In the Polish academic opinions that linguistics has found itself at the crossroads or that it experiences a crisis (e.g. GAJDA, 1998: 11—19; ŻMIGRODZKI, 1998: 63—70) are indeed occasionally expressed, yet it must be noted that representatives of other disciplines (both in Poland and abroad) seem to share such a sentiment. Also in other domains of humanities it is possible to note repetitive claims concerning the exhaustion of theories stemming from the positivist paradigm, opinions concerning the utopian character of scholarship and science, theory of chaos or cognitive games. The old question concerning the possibilities of cognition and its limits returns to the center-stage of academic reflection (see: e.g. BAŃKA, 1991; KAMIŃSKI, 1992, and the others).

⁵ including academic speech patterns.

the icon, the stereotype. Hence, in the postmodern discourse, it is possible to hear voices postulating the “disarming charm” of the lack of precision and of the blurring of epistemological perspectives of scholarship — but also ones professing the need for a new, common cognitive horizon, based on a variety of viewpoints⁶. Such dynamics are undoubtedly among the factors responsible for the development of new paradigms in linguistics.

The most general features of Polish linguistics “after structuralism” may be summarized in a few points⁷. The observations listed below, simplified for conciseness, serve the purpose of emphasizing those traits of the new research stances⁸, which most significantly distinguish them from the assumptions characteristic to stances of what could be termed classic structuralism⁹:

1) *Anti-systemic* and *anti-abstract* character of the new stances: language “in itself” (*langue* understood as an abstract system of signs and logical rules) is no longer the subject of research; instead, new studies focus upon its *use*. Phenomena of the plane of *parole* (conceived of as the only reality of language, multifariously determined both internally and externally) are studied in close relation to the experience and knowledge of the speakers and in the context of the utterance (including its functional-pragmatic, stylistic, political, customary, psychological and other aspects).

2) *The abolition of sharp distinctions between synchrony and diachrony*: a postulate which had also been put forth by structuralism approaching language as an abstract invariant system. In the structuralist view, however, the abstract models and speech patterns are permanent, yet their realization at the plane of *parole*/performance is not central to structural description. Poststructural approaches, conversely, accentuate the fact that the past of the *language* (understood as a convention of speech) largely determines its present (both at the level of the grammatical models and rules, and at the level of generic patterns of speech and writing). History helps explain changes in the *forms of speech*, modes of communication and ways of building various texts in various periods and situations. References to diachrony allow scholars to disclose both the permanence and the changeability of “linguistic images of the world” and makes it

⁶ See: TOKARZ (ed.), 1997.

⁷ See: JĘDRZEJKO, 2008; GRZEGORCZYKOWA, 2001: 55—63; similar opinions have been expressed in a number of works by other authors as well.

⁸ common to a number of oftentimes dissimilar trends.

⁹ I am inclined, however, to maintain the view I have expressed elsewhere that all of these conceptions, stressing various aspects of language as a complex phenomenon remain in what we could call “complementary distribution” and in a multiplicity of mutual relationships. The dissimilarity of assumptions adopted by the proponents of a new theory does not necessarily have to result in the rejection of all of the findings or tools worked out by older theories. In practice, it frequently turns out that new methods confirm results already obtained, thus failing to substantially contribute to the state of knowledge. The postulate of the necessity to account for all aspects of language simultaneously is characteristic of a stance described as *integrationism* or *holism*. No doubt, it is attractive, yet proves most difficult when it comes to its realization in practice.

possible to indicate paths of the transformation of the potential of linguistic means and of their plasticity (irrespective of whether language is understood as a list of structured expressions — as proposed by cognitive grammars — or as a set of *elementary units*, discernible at each of the model-determined levels of this unique “system of systems”). This, in turn, co-determines the form and the style of communications today. Hence, a panchronic and/or transchronic stance is frequently proposed, in which the degree to which the parameter of time (chronologism) is accounted for and the dynamism of the treatment of variations, styles and genres of speech (variancy) — vary.

3) *The emphasis on the ties between language, thinking, action and reality*: such an emphasis translates into the founding of research upon the thesis that language is not only an “apparatus” generating texts according to precisely defined rules. It is also (mainly) the tool of interaction and social control as well as a means of cognition and interpretation of the world. Signs and structures of language result from a socially fixed, albeit subjective in essence, *conceptualization* of reality. It is in signs and categories of language that a certain image of the world has been coded; it becomes discernible in particular modes of speaking, thinking, acting. Such a development, simultaneously, marks a certain turn toward the tradition of linguistics “before structuralism” (Neohumboldtism) — a tradition now enriched owing to the evolution of pragmalinguistic theories — ethnolinguistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics — which frequently resort to the instrumentarium of other disciplines within humanities.

4) *The formation of the theory of language upon conceptual foundation*: such an assumption results in the treatment of the signs of the lexicon and grammatical categories as an outcome of the conceptualization of phenomena perceived experientially — in language. Such an approach takes into account sociological and psychological factors controlling processes of the “mapping” of reality by the subject of the cognitive experience. It also bears in mind the human capacity of the metaphorization of concepts, which results in the shift of linguistic focus toward the metaphor, previously “excluded” from the space of linguistic research. As an effect of the above, owing primarily to the developments in cognitive linguistics, scholars tend to place special emphasis upon the key role of the metaphor in building forms lending shape to meanings in language. The conceptualization of individual elements of reality — attained also (or even mainly) on the basis of conceptual metaphors — is an elementary cognitive mechanism determining the relations between the form and the meaning of a word, text, or formally dissimilar expressions. The turn toward the metaphor allows one both to shed light upon and to profile selected aspects of a given event/concept (A) by means of a different event/concept (B). After all, the task of linguistics is the reconstruction of the “images beyond words” on the basis of a structured utterance (word, phrase, text) — and it is in the utterance that the ideal cognitive models (ICM) and scenarios of linguistic and extralinguistic behaviors become variedly manifest.

5) *An increase in the interest in various peripheral facts of language (at crossroads of broadly understood grammar, semantics and pragmatics* — translating into focus upon facts of unclear categorial or typological status, as opposed to the structuralist focus upon “sharp”, univocal, universal facts of language, lending themselves to formal description by means of the conceptual apparatus of logic. The factor facilitating such a shift is a new theory of categorization, which does away with the “classic” concept of a category (as defined in terms of binary oppositions) and favors blurred categories (i.e. prototype, grade, scalar, mono and polycentric categories). It is a significant change — also because it facilitates the allotment of a given TOKEN (word, expression) to a given class (TYPE). This also concerns texts bearing no characteristic traits allowing one to unambivalently ascribe them to a given generic pattern: among such texts one could list the “new” (?) genres of the language of the Internet or prototextual genres (such as “chat”, “blog”, “lid”, or “summary”).

6) *Interdisciplinarity*: as perceived in the perspective of: a) communications — i.e. understood in terms of action, or interaction between the sender and the recipient of the message, and, consequently, both a structure and a process; b) anthropology — i.e. understood as a part of the human cognitive mechanism and c) ethnocultural studies — i.e. as a component of culture and an element of social life, the study of language requires an approach characterized by interdisciplinarity. This, in turn, triggers the need to produce new methodological instrumentarium (beyond that generated by structuralism). Substructural linguistics is now in the process of developing new operational concepts, frequently making up for the shortage of tools by resorting to those worked out by other disciplines. It moves away, however, from the formal apparatus of logic, repudiating it as inadequate for the purpose of the study of language in its variety (its signs and senses, its pragmatic functions, goals of communication, etc.).

Among the new (more, or less distinctive) “poststructural” currents, variously related to the broad domain of contemporary pragmalinguistics¹⁰, it is *communicationism* (alternatively referred to as communicatology, communicative grammar, textology, text studies or genology) that receives most attention. Research done by the representatives of this direction rests upon the ideas developed

¹⁰ The broad linguistic pragmatics of today seems to be incorporating various “para-structural” and poststructural ideas oriented toward the study of language and its products in the process of communication — or, conversely, inspires their emergence (cf. Wrośz (ed.), 2001). In a sense, such a process may also be perceived as an aftermath of the structuralist separation of *langue* into *langue* and *parole*. Especially the speech act theory may be treated as complementary (and perhaps also supplementary) to the idea of the separation of the abstract plane of *langue* from its concretization/realization in the plane of *parole*. From the point of view of syntax, this may mean that a sentence understood as a formal-semantic model of the structure of an utterance isolated from a particular communicative situation is the highest unit of language (*langue*), while a sentence as realized in the plane of *parole* may be the smallest self-standing communicative text or a component of complex texts understood as suprasentential wholes.

by linguistic pragmatics, including sociolinguistics, theory of genre and speech act theory, game theory, feminist linguistics/stylistics, text/discourse grammar. Another poststructural offshoot of linguistic research is the subdiscipline of cultural-cognitive linguistics. Above all, cognitivism emphasizes the immersion of the language in cognitive processes, while ethnolinguistics stresses its rootedness in a culture of a given ethnos (a nation, a cultural region, an ethnic group). Experiences, upon which cultural-cognitive linguistics builds its discourse are also shared by textology and linguistic genology, in whose perspectives a linguistic text (as a macro-sign) is the central subject of description and typology. Even though these subdisciplines (and theories at their foundations) accentuate their goals and assumptions differently, the limit of the areas of their individual interests are not always clear — as is their relation to the structuralist heritage. Basically, however, they share a general orientation toward *language in use and in action* (speaking, communicating, text and its structure, discourse and its varieties, styles, and genres, as well as the components and the determinants of the above). To an extent greater than was the case in structuralist studies, textology and linguistic genology account for the “human factor” in their methods, concentrating largely upon the sender and the receiver, their mutual relation, intentions, goals, etc.

In the context of the above, and the emergence of new currents notwithstanding, it seems safe to claim that many of the contemporary linguistic theories bear traces of structuralist inspirations. These, among others, include inspirations drawn from generative grammars, visible, for instance, in Langacker’s cognitive grammar, in text grammar, or in the so-called communicational grammars. Also, contemporary linguistics may successfully be characterized in terms of general principles of constructing research procedures, described as:

- a) the principle of spatial and temporal determinacy of the phenomenon;
- b) the principle of the limited complexity of description;
- c) the principle of structuredness (variously understood);
- d) the principle of extrapolation (see e.g. LUKSZYN, 1992: 65—71).

New ideas were primarily born out of the refusal to accept the structuralist rigors (formalization) and in search of ways to overcome the limited explanatory power of structuralism as a methodology. Both factors resulted in the openness for new sources of inspiration, sought for in history, anthropology, sociology of culture, ethnology, psychology or neurology.

New modes of language description yield previously unattainable cognitive effects, which, nonetheless, seem to complement, rather than contradict, those characteristic for the structuralist perspective. New paradigms and the development of the interdisciplinary studies transgress the limits separating subdisciplines of linguistics itself (morphology-lexicology-syntax; semantics-grammar-pragmatics), yet at the same time, as GAJDA (1998: 11—19) observes, they introduce a degree of chaos into the field and give rise to cognitive skepticism. Even though it would probably be difficult to postulate the existence of

“coherent linguistics” today, it is nonetheless possible to observe the emergence of two relatively distinct positions within the field¹¹:

On the one hand, it is possible to note attempts to transform or to complement the heritage of structuralism, which tendency manifests itself in the emergence of newer generative conceptions, such as modified theories of government and binding, newer conceptions of logical semantics stemming out of communication theory, or certain propositions of text grammar, variously related to both generativism and pragmatics.

On the other hand, it is possible to observe the rise of trends rooted in broadly understood communicatology, manifest, for instance, in discourse analysis (approached as the process of transmission and reception), or in genological text interpretation (which takes into account both its macrostructure and its functions as realized through a variety of linguistic means). Scholars representing these subdisciplines resort to the accomplishments of the speech act theory and theory of genre, and employ tools developed by literary scholarship as well as sociology and psychology for the purpose of multifaceted research on communication, its mechanisms and controlling functions (e.g.: while studying persuasion and manipulation as kinds of communication games, or while analyzing therapeutic or ludic games as important functions of language communications and as significant elements of contemporary mass culture).

It is thus possible to observe multidirectional attempts at seeking new explanations to “old” problems (which, admittedly, in the structuralist paradigm were considered marginal). Likewise, it is easy to note tendencies to anchor newer ideas in older currents — both in “post-de Saussurean” structuralism itself and in prestructural diachronic research, but also in conceptions developed within other disciplines: literary studies, ethnography, sociology, cultural anthropology, or cognitive psychology.

It leaves no doubt that the past century, in which — mainly owing to its structuralist involvements — linguistics attained its academic autonomy, proves immensely important for the scholars of today. Yet, at the same time, it must be remembered that the 20th c. saw only some of many stages in the history of linguistics — and in the life of natural languages. It seems clear that the present day tendency to “pick up lost threads and revert to unresolved issues” is a direct or indirect consequence of the structuralist separation of *langue* into *langue* and *parole*, the stress today falling on the latter of the two. It is also an effect of the buildup of experiences brought about by prestructural linguistics: hence the return to the historical-comparative methods and a renewed interest in etymology (both largely marginalized in the period of the dominance of structuralism and later generativism), hence the return to theses proposed originally by Humboldt or Sapir (cognitive-cultural conception of language as the *interpreter* of the world, reflect-

¹¹ Cf. JĘDRZEJKO, 1995, 1997, 2002.

ing the mode of perception of reality characteristic for a given community and consequently yielding a particular “linguistic image of the world”). The significant change between the linguistics of the past and that of today consists in the shift in emphasis, which now is put on the multifaceted, psychosocial motivation of linguistic mechanisms, products and behaviors. Such a shift simultaneously legitimizes the theoretical syncretism and sanctions the pluralism of adopted research methods¹², even though it does not permit chaotic juggle of methodologies. The new vista, however, opens when methodologies synergistically converge, especially in contexts in which they may control one another, simultaneously allowing the scholar to attain a multifaceted perception of the phenomenon under research.

The revisions of the inherited paradigms of linguistics translate into attempts to construct models of *language in action* (communication models, genre pattern models). These developments, in turn, call into existence new tasks of linguistics: a versatile description and interpretations of elements of language (*langue* as a psycho-cultural entity) as well as of its products — texts (macro-signs) and processes of communication (transmission and reception). Contemporary currents of “open linguistics” build their own theories of language, rejecting the conceptual frame of formal grammars, which would sever language from history, ethnocultural conditioning and from authentic communication acts. Yet, they also draw from tradition, resorting to functional linguistics and “grammar of contents”, to philosophy of colloquial speech, or rhetoric. The new subdisciplines will also employ the findings and tools of other domains of knowledge: sociology and anthropology of culture, cognitive psychology, literary scholarship, communication studies. Scholars will make use of concepts developed by the literary genealogical tradition; they have embraced the idea of “family resemblance” and the concept of games, as proposed by Ludwig Wittgenstein; they would resort to Eleanor Rosch’s prototype theory, or to ideas offered by Neo-Humboldtians. New currents of “postmodern linguistics” reverberate with echoes of the concepts proposed by Derrida, McLuhan, Baudrillard and many of the other contemporary thinkers, yet in numerous areas of research — despite the introduction of original terminology (such as profiling, landmark, trajectory, scanning or idealized cognitive models, proposed by cognitivists), despite the difference in the understanding of *grammar* itself (as in: *text grammar* of *cognitive grammar*) — the influence of the great structuralist schools such as generative semantics, case grammar or semantic syntax (devoid of its logical-mathematical conceptual apparatus) is clearly discernible.

A contemporary researcher of language and its products has at his or her disposal a wide variety of propositions and methods of which to choose depending on questions asked and answers sought. The abundance of options, however,

¹² Undying interest in the linguistic mechanisms of creating textual worlds (in literary and non-literary texts of press, politics or advertisement), as well as in transformations obtaining in this area testifies to the validity of the claim.

poses inevitable dilemmas concerning the selection of tools, ways of combining available discourses or the need to retain balanced proportions between the necessary scientific objectivism and the inevitable subjectivism of perspective. The multiparadigmatic characteristics of contemporary linguistics, merging elements of objectivized description (structure analysis) and subjectively tinged interpretation, undoubtedly open new, fascinating areas of scholarly penetration. At the same time, however, it allows one to pick up threads abandoned in the past. It is not accidental that a variety of “blurred” phenomena have received special attention in contemporary linguistic research: along with the growth of scholarly interest in *parole* also the need to address areas of irregularity (non-prototypicality), which the formerly dominant, formalized models of language failed to explain, exponentially develops. It comes then as no surprise that, more frequently than ever before, a contemporary linguist will frequently find himself or herself at the crossroads; yet, as never before, the multiplicity of available and constantly developed propositions allows one to believe that it is possible to come closer to the truth of this fascinating phenomenon, language.

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